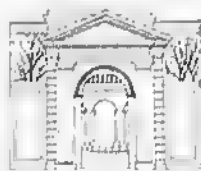


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## PONDY PAPERS IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

1

About decentralization:  
two studies on multi-level planning  
in South India

Abdul AZIZ  
Jean RACINE

MAY 1989

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

ABOUT DECENTRALIZATION: TWO STUDIES ON MULTI-  
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## FOREWORD

With the coming general elections, all major parties are reasserting the need for some decentralization of administration and planning. Both opposition parties and the Congress-I plead for going forward in this direction, presented to the voter as a significant step usefully linking expanded democracy and increased development.

Beyond the rhetorics of electoral manifestos, the All-India picture, in this regard, is however quite diversified, and the diversity observed, it must be noted, transcends the political affiliations. Some Congress States, such as Maharashtra and Gujarat, have effectively promoted some decentralization of power. Outside the Congress realm, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka and West Bengal have tried also to provide more power to the base. Nearly 40% of West Bengal's total plan budget has been devolved to the District and Block Planning Committees, for instance. On the other hand, some Congress as well as non-Congress states have not done much, or did nothing in this field. In some states, such as Tamil Nadu, for more than a decade, even local elections were not conducted.

In this overall context, and focussing our interest on a limited but significant issue, i.e. decentralization process in planning, it was found worthwhile to regroup here two studies paying attention to two states —Karnataka and Tamil Nadu— which have followed in the last decade very different ways in this regard. Jean Racine's paper is based upon field work conducted in a district of Tamil Nadu. It is technical in a way, but also hypothetical, for the tools for multi-level planning can certainly be sharpened in Tamil Nadu as elsewhere, but this will be of little use if there is no political will for implementing some sort of decentralization in the planning process. Abdul Aziz's paper on the other hand, attempt an evaluation of what was actually done in Karnataka recently, as the politico-administrative reform implemented through the Karnataka Zilla Parishads, Taluks Panchayat Samithi Mandal Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayats Act of 1985, cleared the ground for decentralized planning as well.

It is hoped that these two different approaches will in a way complement each other, and that they will also provide material for a larger comparative perspective. After all, is not decentralization a state of art as well as a state of mind which implies the acknowledgement of diversity as an inevitable parameter imposing itself to those who wish to understand reality, or wish to transform it?

Jean Racine

I

Sharpening the tools for multi-level planning  
A Tamil Study

Jean RACINE

MAY 1989

The debate on "Development from above *or* below ?" is in part over, as most of the decision-makers and analysts do now agree that development has to be planned and stimulated both from above *and* below.<sup>1</sup> The arguments against the centre - down approach are well known. The growth poles theory, rooted in neo-classical economic thought, is certainly coherent, but in many cases, the results of its implementation in planning exercises have fallen well below expectations, particularly as far as employment is concerned. On the other hand, bottom-up strategies, no matter how attractive they are on paper, are difficult to implement for a number of reasons, a few of these being the structure of local powers, the parochial behaviour of many local representatives, and probably also, to a certain extent, the predominantly quantitative approach that prevails in the monitoring of development programmes at district and block levels.

Whatever the challenges may be, the Planning Commission has clearly asserted in "The Approach to the Seventh Plan" that the guiding principles of the Plan (growth, equity, social justice, self-reliance, improved efficiency and productivity) and its basic priorities (food, work and productivity), as defined by the Government of India, can be successfully respected only if bottom-up strategies are duly efficient, or, in other words, if planning for development is carried on both from above and below. I quote from the Planning Commission document (Part. I, II. 12) : "Success in achieving all the objectives described above would depend on the extent to which the Plan reflects popular aspirations. It can only do so effectively if the processes of plan formulation and implementation are decentralised. The integration of local interests with a national plan through an effective process of

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The present paper is a revised version of a communication presented in July 1986 at the National Seminar on Regional Planning held at Kashmir University, Srinagar. Thanks are due to Kashmiri experts and to Professor C.T. Kurien, Madras Institute of Development Studies, for comments on the original paper.

decentralized planning will facilitate public participation and allow people to see their concerns in a national context".<sup>2</sup> The question, henceforth, is no longer whether to plan from above or from below, but rather how we can plan from above *and* from below, with particular emphasis on how to plan from below and how to put decentralized planning on the rails.

It would be ridiculously presumptuous of the author of the present paper to try to answer these basic questions as such. I shall instead limit my objectives, and submit only a few reflections that have emerged from a field study conducted in a Tamil district, South Arcot. I hope that these reflections may contribute usefully to the present thinking on the multi-level approach.

A further step beyond multi-level planning is decentralized planning, which is now recognized in official rhetorics as a promising strategy for development. But, to date, at least in Tamil Nadu, what has been attempted is much more multi-level planning than decentralized planning.

Conclusions drawn from the following analysis will emphasize what seem to be requisities for sharpening the tools for multi-level planning: a more efficient information system and an approach that pays more attention to spatial factors, spatial stakes in development strategies.

## **MULTI-LEVEL PLANNING AND DECENTRALIZED PLANNING: AN ACKNOWLEDGED CHALLENGE**

I do not intend to discuss here the over all issue of decentralized planning, but it may be relevant to refer to two recent papers published on that topic by noted Indian economists. First from Ashok Rudra's study<sup>3</sup>, I would point out that, at least as a piece of rhetoric, the question of decentralized planning is not a new one in India. Thirty years ago the Second Plan clearly paid attention to the significance of expected village and district plans, which were supposed to form a basis for the formulation of the State Plans. Later on, committees were set up in order to explore the best possible institutional and spatial frameworks for decentralization (Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, 1958; Asoka Mehta Committee, 1977). However - I quote Rudra - "there was practically no decentralized planification if this concept implies that information and guidelines have to be exchanged both ways between two levels, whatever they could be"<sup>4</sup>: "Decentralized implementation of a central plan is unavoidable in any large country and cannot be called

decentralized planification".<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, according to Rudra, it is "methodologically impossible to formulate efficient procedures of decentralized planification (in India) due to the total lack of harmonisation between this type of planification and the type of economy in which it has to apply".<sup>6</sup>

C.T. Kurien who, it is interesting to note, was a member of the Planning Commission's Committee on District Level Planning, agrees that "assembling departmental schemes within the district frame" (quoting a Planning Commission Report) "is neither planning nor decentralization, but simply an exercise in administrative devolution". Planning is all the more limited, Kurien adds, as in the Indian "mixed economy, private sector units with the market as their chief information and coordination channel have a degree of autonomy far surpassing that of multi-level bodies within a comprehensively planned economic system".<sup>7</sup>

Both the authors referred to, go on to underline the difficulty faced in setting up true decentralized planning in the Indian socio-economic system.

While recognizing that an authentic decentralized planning which leaves room for popular participation is certainly a challenging prospect in the present Indian context (indeed, in what country, would such a planning process not be a challenge?). I shall refrain from discussing the changes in policies, in politics and in the socio-economic structure which would be required for paving the way to popular participation in planning and I shall instead set myself a more limited objective. Let us start from the assumption that, if multi-level planning is by no means necessarily decentralized, the expected decentralized planning would have to be partly multi-level as far as its conception and its formulation are concerned.

Two correlated questions then deserve attention:

1. What lessons can we draw from a multi-level analysis of multi-level planning?
2. Which of these lessons would be relevant for decentralized planning, as far as planning techniques are concerned?

To dismiss the relevance of the study of planning techniques on the grounds that the key factor is not technical but political is valid only up to a point, because no planning technique is devoid of social significance - particularly in its shortcomings. The way plans are designed and the way they are - or are not - implemented offer topics of

enquiry that can help the analyst answer a fundamental question: for whom does one plan?

So let us look in some detail at multi-level planning strategies and practices in Tamil Nadu.

### EXPERIMENTS IN MULTI-LEVEL PLANNING IN TAMIL NADU: FROM HIGH EXPECTATIONS TO CREDIT PLANS

Attempts at multi-level planning as such appeared in Tamil Nadu in the early seventies, after the DMK Chief Minister, M. Karunanidhi, set up a State Planning Commission in May 1971.

Within a few years, a tremendous number of analyses and projections were produced, both at the State level and at the District level.

At the State level, we had a succession of plans:

- The Fourth Five Year Plan 1969-1974;
- The Fifth Five Year Plan 1974-1979;
- The Perspective Plan for Tamil Nadu 1974-1984;
- The Draft Five Year Plan 1978-1983;
- The Sixth Five Year Plan 1980-1985;
- and, now, the Seventh Five Year Plan 1985-1990.

The enumeration shows only too well that more than one of the Plans were short lived, mainly because of political evolution at the national level (the Janata interlude for instance).

At the district level, which is our primary concern here, a remarkable ebullience characterized the early seventies. For the first time, the Perspective Plan for Tamil Nadu 1974-1984 shown real interest in regional planning. The Plan, released in 1974, resulted from a three-fold strategy: the use of an Investment Model; the elaboration of sectoral plans prepared by fifteen task forces, which released separate reports; and District Plans.

Thirteen District Cells covering the entire State prepared District Perspective Plans for 23 "development districts". The Deputy Chairman of the State Planning Commission presented a definition of Development Districts in these terms, and explained why District Planning - "an innovation" - was justified:

"District Planning is an attempt to translate into practice the concept of planning from below so that the specific problems each area faces can be assessed and solutions found on the basis of local decisions and mobilisation of local resources -human and material. Target planning and central and state indicative programming will then be supplemented and supported by such realistic and effective planning from below. As a pragmatic step in this direction, the viable unit of planning at the District level in Tamil Nadu has been identified as the Development District".<sup>8</sup>

In fact, Development Districts were planning units defined by the District Planning Cell, i.e. by a three-man group consisting of the Collector, the District Planning Officer and the District Statistical Officer. On the basis of block-level socio-economic data, the Cell divided the South Arcot District into two Development Districts encompassed entire taluks. In each Development District sub-regions were defined on the basis of block related similarities: geographical entities were thus more respected, even if summarily, at low level (sub-region) than at middle level (development district, or, in other words, aggregation of taluks).

As a planning exercise, the attempt was not excessively ambitious: the definition of sub-regions was established along broad lines, and, above all, the approach remained fundamentally sectoral. For each subdivision of each of four main sectors (primary, secondary, tertiary sectors and social services), projects and schemes were listed according to sub-region: no profile of expected or desirable interaction between projects and sectors was attempted on a spatial basis.

At the same time, strangely enough, another attempt at multi-level planning was conducted, by another body also set up in 1971 by the Government of Tamil Nadu: The Directorate of Town and Country Planning (DTCP).

While the District Planning Cells were preparing 23 Development District Plans for the State Planning Commission, the DTCP was involved in Regional Planning. The State was divided into only eight Planning Regions, much larger, of course, than the Development Districts of the Planning Commission. The DTCP was much more concerned than its counterpart with the regional specificity, much more concerned also with an area approach, illustrated with maps. Even if the selected scales did not offer much scope for detail, an attempt at thematic mapping was evident. Significantly, the regions were not necessarily based on whole administrative units. South Arcot, for example, was divided in three (see map 1): the Northern taluks were

attached to one planning region; the Chidambaram taluk was, logically, attached to another planning region which included the Kaveri delta; whilst the bulk of the district (5 taluks out of 8) was included in the Salem-Cuddalore Planning Region which, with Salem iron-ore, Neyveli lignite and Cuddalore port, was expected to become a major industrial axis for the entire state.<sup>9</sup> Despite the growth of Salem and Neyveli as authentic heavy industrial bases, nothing of that sort happened, nor did the forecasts for urban growth materialize: the projected population of the Cuddalore-Neyveli complex, as defined in the document, was 900,000 for 1991, whilst its population was only 330,000 in 1981. This unrealistic emphasis on urban growth - a growth supposed to result from an industrial boom - is largely outdated now, as is the overall physical development strategy of the Regional Plan, which recommended that "all developments should be concentrated in the major urban centres identified along the Salem-Cuddalore corridor rather than attempting large scale dispersal".<sup>10</sup>

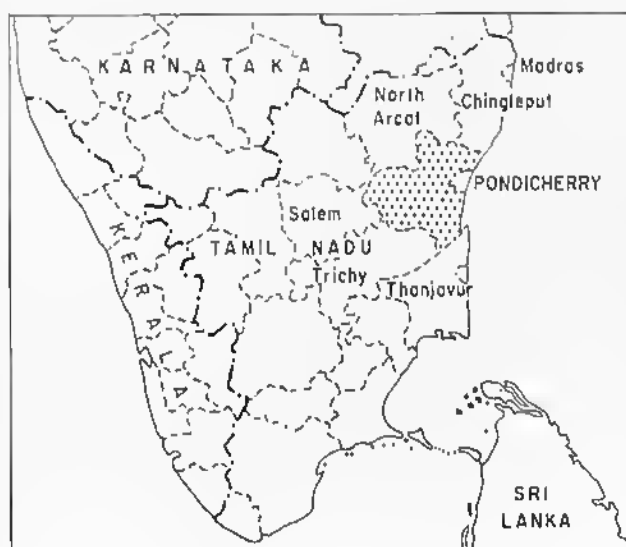
At the same time, a third exercise was conducted by Indian consultants for the Government of Tamil Nadu: the Techno-Economic Surveys. These surveys were elaborated for districts, and relied upon district level and block level data. As a result, a picture of South Arcot emerged in 1973, in two volumes.<sup>11</sup> A large number of sectors were analysed, in order to evolve "a development strategy for the district", with special emphasis given to industrial potential. The Survey was not a District Plan *per se*, but clearly presented, for each sector, precise and localized suggestions.

An analysis of the three documents mentioned above (all of them published in 1972 or 1973) brought to light a few interesting conclusions.


The first serious attempt at planning at a level that was below the State level was still undecided on one major point: which spatial unit to choose? The district itself, offering the convenience of its administrative set-up? The "development district", divided into sub-regions, and smaller than the administrative district? Or a planning region, larger than the administrative district? An additional question emerged: what unit should be retained for constituting the key planned area? While the sub-region of the development district was an aggregation of blocks, the planning region of the DTCP was an aggregation of taluks, though some data was also collected at block level.

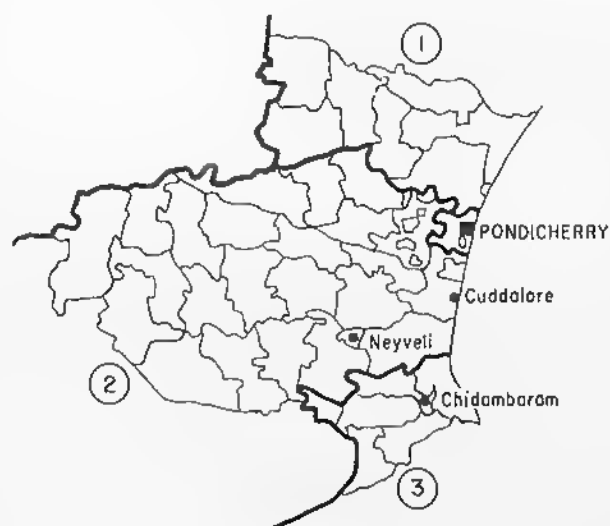
On the other hand - and this is our second remark - the DTCP took the lead on another major point: its regional plan clearly underlined the fact that "Regional Planning is of a comprehensive nature and con-

Map 1. The spatial dimensions of the 1972-73 planning exercises



Localization map

 South Arcot District



Planning regions 1972

- ① Modros - Chingleput Region
- ② Salem - Cuddalore Region
- ③ Trichy - Thonjovur Region

Drift Regional Plans

Directorate of Town and Country Planning



Development Districts 1973

- Ⓐ North Development District
- Ⓑ South Development District

6 Sub-Regions

Ⓐ

Ⓑ

 Wet farming  
 Dry farming  
 Mixed farming

 Wet farming  
 Dry farming  
 Industrial

The 1972 delineation of planning regions dismembered the district, while the 1973 perspective subdivided it according to block-wise characteristics

centrates on inter-sectoral problems and on inter-relations,<sup>12</sup> whilst the "Development District" Plans were still confined to a sectoral approach.

A third point emerges in all studies, clearly underlined again by the DTCP: "the most serious difficulty has been lack of information and where information was available, it was for different geographic units".<sup>13</sup> This has far-reaching implications on two levels. First, the type of data available, which is in most cases sectoral, tends to facilitate a sectoral approach, rather than a combined one. Second, access to data is invariably easier inside official circles than outside.

This brings us to a fourth conclusion: all these attempts at regional or district planning made in the early seventies were clearly up-down exercises, with no provision for public participation. Industrial associations, Chambers of commerce and trade agencies were sometimes consulted, say the authors of the 1973 Techno-Economic Survey, but basically, it was left to future bodies - maybe through an hypothetical Regional Planning Authority - to refine these preliminary documents "through constant updating of information with continuing dialogue between planners and the people".<sup>14</sup>

Where do we stand now, more than fifteen years later? First of all, regional planning never really materialized. The Regional Planning Authority was never set up. What was called District Planning was in fact essentially an exercise in the devolution of financial resources approved by the State, and, as the Central Planning Commission put it itself, "purely an aggregation of departmental schemes". At the district level, and at the block level as well, plans were at best just credit plans, or even simply a delineation of scheme-based and block-based targets. In South Arcot the first Credit Plan was published by the district lead bank, Indian Bank, in 1977, for a period of five years (1977-1982). But another three-year Plan promptly prepared for 1980-1985 followed soon. Parallel to this, Departments or Agencies were establishing documents which they called "plans", which are in fact a compilation of annual financial and physical targets: the blocks plans released by the District Rural Development Agency for the Integrated Rural Development Programme are significant examples of this strategy.

To a certain extent, this reluctance on the part of State authorities to set up true regional planning structures can be understood when one considers the problem of power - of sharing power, whatever party is governing the State. This question can be briefly looked at on four interacting levels: the government, the bureaucracy, the elected representatives, the people.

As far as Tamil Nadu is concerned, one political choice was a determining factor: for more than a decade up to 1986, no local representative was elected in the State. The panchayats and panchayat unions were left with no voice: the very institutions that were supposed to convey upwards, to the decision-makers, the specific demands of clearly located populations could not perform the role allotted to them since the inception of Community Development strategy. Block Development Officers, acting all those years as Panchayat Union Commissioners, were thus for a long time both judge and judged as far as the implementation of planned development strategies at the grass-roots level was concerned: rural feedback, the opportunity for free comment on the results of the development policies, was henceforth largely a self judgement; to be monitored mainly at higher levels of the bureaucracy, the criteria for success being the plan target-plan achievement ratio.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, the only representatives elected on the universal franchise basis were MLAs and MPs. This was not insignificant as far as planning at the multi-level is concerned. These elected members, carried much more political weight than the temporarily defunct Panchayat chairmen. They represented areas much larger than blocks, and were in a way more difficult partners for planners and officers in charge of implementation. From the lowest level of the Development bureaucracy up to the Collector chairing the District Development Council, all the district officers were subject to possible pressure when dealing either with sectoral allocations (on matters of interest to socio-economic lobbies) and/or with spatial allocations. At the State level, generally speaking, it seems that the State Planning Commission, after the juvenile enthusiasm for regional or district plans which characterized the early seventies, slowly cooled its judgments on the practicability of these plans, and - even if off the record - seemed to regret that the discussion of multi-level plans was too often marred by the parochialism of many of the representatives not always eager to look beyond the limited interest of their own electoral constituency.

Here is, I believe, an unavoidable dilemma which all attempts at multi-level planning are expected to face: consultation between representatives, whoever they are (political, socio-professional, local), is a must in a democracy, but in the meantime these consultations result in discordant and disorganised expressions of competing views.

The difficulty is further aggravated if the regional planner adds to his two basic questions "what?" and "where" a third one: "for whom?". The question cannot be considered without reference to two

important factors: the channels offered for popular expression, and the relevance of grass-roots level information about the poor.

The first point raises the issue of intermediate bodies (political or not) and hence the issue of social structure, local power, social competition and inequality. For whom, in the final analysis, do intermediate bodies and representatives speak when presenting advice to planners: the local elite, the rising middle classes, or the poor ?

The second point raises a major methodological issue, which, as we might expect, is not just methodological, but also has far reaching social implications and as such deserves special attention.

### LOOKING FOR A SHARPER INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS SYSTEM

The question of obtaining grass-roots level information on the poor is just a part of a larger challenge: how to build up the valid information and analysis system required for multi-level planning and development?

Even though expectations raised by attempts at regional or district planning have not been satisfactorily fulfilled, the process of establishing block level credit plans, development programmes and regular monitoring has built up a very positive habit of taking into consideration realities at block level too, and this testifies to an increased attention paid to micro-regional specificities.

However, there are many questions to be answered, as far as block units are concerned: these are questions of adequacy. A block is a good unit for planning, but is it the best?

The first question concerns the correlation between administrative limits and the real identity of micro-regions. In South Arcot, for instance, take the oval-shaped Neyveli red plateau: these are dry lands, practically deprived of irrigation, with an agriculture based on cashew nuts and coarse grains. The design of the blocks explains how the very clearly defined specificity of the plateau has become blurred, and the strong contrast between it and the surrounding low lands devoted to paddy considerably attenuated on district maps based on block data. Hence the specificity of the micro-region is much less expressed than it should be, all the more so as the plateau is a poor and backward area which has not derived much benefit from the Neyveli mining complex.

The second question concerns the disproportion between the block as an intervention area and the intensity of the development bureaucracy coverage. The findings of my MIDS study on rural development networks and Development Blocks grid in South Arcot<sup>16</sup> tend to show that either the blocks are too large or they do not have enough staff. Smaller than blocks, the Revenue *firka* seem to be a more efficient potential intervention area. That intervention areas are too large to be efficiently attended to by officers seems true also at the lowest levels, be it those of the Rural Welfare Officers or those of the Village Extension Workers from the Agriculture Department. We shall not discuss this point here, or debate the financial constraints which may prevent the appointment of more officers to act at the block level and below. But I do believe that this point is not irrelevant for planners, as through the Block Development Officers and the Agricultural Officers, it is the grass-roots level officers who transmit (or not) upwards the image of their intervention areas, and the image of the dynamics of their areas. The accuracy of such images depends necessarily upon these officers' capacity for covering their area efficiently: this is not just a matter of target-achievement ratios, which are normally attainable but also, mainly, a matter of social coverage. In other words, at the block level and below, when the target is met, how many people and of what category are left out, with what consequences for the forecasts?

The problem of sharpening an information and analysis system for multi-level planning is thus multifold. The emphasis given by the VIth Plan to favouring an household strategy of rural development has opened the way to abundant and unpublished topical surveys in the villages. Besides the question of the validity of the answers collected by the Rural Welfare Officers on the standard forms and questionnaires of the District Rural Development Agencies, there is also the problem of preservation of data. In fact so much data is collected in India by so many institutions that this problem of preservation is a serious one, the more so when attention is paid to grass-roots level or medium level spatial dynamics, as, very often, when data is consolidated at an upper level, the original documents are no longer available.

The problem of data use is just as serious. The inadequacy of mapping techniques is extremely frequent and contributes to a certain extent to a squandering of data whose value is neglected, or even to inaccurate information. There have been some commendable efforts which are worthy of note, but which have sometimes produced very poor results: if we look at the block maps drawn by block engineers for the District Collectorate, this problem can be seen all too well. The lack of training, and the departmental approach (which disregarded additional data not available in the Department, for the mapping

of schools for instance) have resulted in a final document whose validity is uncertain. No fully-fledged planning at block level can be done if mapping techniques remain as they are at present. Parallel to this, information which could very easily be used for building up significant maps is left aside. It is true that maps might sometimes illustrate strong spatial inequalities that bureaucracy might wish to conceal in the austerity of data tables: a map which could be very easily drawn showing block-wise credit requirements per capita under the Annual Action Plans will provide a striking example of such an imbalance. It seems however that the deficiencies of the maps are rather the result of a lack of practice than a deliberate wish to conceal micro-regional disparities.

A more systematic use of easily elaborated maps, involving minimal training, would really provide a more adequate picture of these disparities, both for planners and for officers in charge of implementation and/or monitoring. In many instances, as a matter of fact, the heterogeneity of space is under-estimated. Blocks are commonly considered as being units of roughly one lakh people, who require, generally speaking, the same amenities (one primary health centre, for instance), more or less the same credit (roughly 20 lakhs per block for IRDP in 1983-1984), and the same coverage as far as benefits are concerned. But block homogeneity is nothing but a misconception: block areas in South Arcot range from 164 to 450 km<sup>2</sup>, their rural population ranges from 67,000 to 135,000, their scheduled caste population ranges from 17,000 to 40,000.<sup>17</sup>

If these disparities are not sufficiently taken into account, the evaluation of needs is necessarily overlooked, not only at the theoretical and absolute levels, where discussions can go unabated, but also at the practical and relative levels, where a judicious distribution of credit, amenities and interventions might ideally be expected for more or less all the population.

If more consideration were given to what could be achieved with traditional mapping techniques, manageable at the block level, this would sharpen very usefully the awareness of some of the fundamental dynamics affecting the smaller units of multi-level planning. But such an effort cannot be a substitute for a systematic improvement of the information system at district and block levels, relying upon computerization.<sup>18</sup> By preserving in this way the impressive quantity of unpublished data collected from the village level upwards we shall avoid the possibility of the information being spoilt or deliberately destroyed after a few years (for saving space!), as is the case today for some agricultural data in the taluk offices. Computerization would also

provide planners with the possibility of automatic mapping on a large scale, a fantastic tool, if properly and imaginatively programmed, for constantly monitoring multi-level change with an accuracy never before possible. Thus the diachronic and the synchronic perspectives could be systematically combined, in order to obtain, in data as well as in maps, new significant observation illustrating trends as well as combinations.

However promising computerization and automatic mapping could be, they are only tools and techniques, and their usefulness would depend on the availability of basic (and accurate!) information, and also on the attitude and thinking which govern the exercise.

The first limitation is an obvious one, which it is nevertheless worth repeating: planning is a socio-economic exercise expressing political choices. On the one hand, good planning does not require *only* good information; on the other hand, the degree of planning efficiency does not simply depend upon the acuteness and the relevance of the planning exercise but also - and this is crucial! - on its implementation.

The second limitation results from the difficulties in obtaining access to certain types of information. Consider, for instance, two fundamental parameters of development: environment and market.

In a number of cases, environment studies result in much more uncertainty than the planners would expect. Experts can disagree, for instance, on such a basic problem as where to put the limits of arid and semi-arid India, and governments, for lack of established scientific criteria, have more often than not divergent indexes for defining, for instance, drought prone areas.<sup>19</sup> Questions that are highly relevant for genuine planning, aiming at area development, could be multiplied at will: scientists usually provide what is, at a given time, the standard and acknowledged answer, but in many cases opposing views are also advanced by other experts: is the water table, in this or these blocks, really lowering due to the multiplication of tube-wells? Is eucalyptus planting promoted by social forestry schemes, likely to bring ecological imbalances? Is shifting cultivation in tribal hills such as the Kalrayans as bad as many people think? Is the technique of artificial rain, highly in vogue in Madras Secretariat a few years ago, worthwhile or not?

The evaluation of market forces illustrates another facet of the information gap. Uncertainty here is not only the result of debates amongst experts. Concealment of data by interested parties and the constantly moving nature of market forces inevitably play their part. As the market "frequently becomes a counter-coordinating mechanism"<sup>20</sup> opposing planners strategies in India's mixed economy system, knowl-

edge of local market forces is vital for multi-level planning and monitoring. In district and block planning, as it is practised, the evaluation of the role of market forces - strengthening/or hampering the government development strategies - is however much less than what would be required for a fully-fledged development strategy acting upon spatial dynamics for the sake of social welfare: such an evaluation, as a matter of fact, is hardly conducted.

And here we touch on a third limitation: the type of attention paid to what we might call, with deliberate vagueness, "the human factor" or, in other words, all these forces acting for change, reacting to change, or challenged by change. Such forces are not easily ingurgitated by computers, for two distinct reasons. First, some of these factors express qualitative phenomena: for instance, the rationales of the people, vis a vis social behaviour and economic choices. Shall I approach a government officer for a loan? Shall I request a village leader to second my demand? Shall I try a new crop? What risks will be involved? Shall I stay here, or shall I leave the village, alone or with my family? There is no end to those questions which express at the grass-roots level, for individuals and for households, the real issues at stake concerning development or non-development here, in this block, in this village, in this precisely located piece of land. How can planning attempt to take these vital but non measurable parameters into account?

The second component of what has been called the human factor refers not so much to the individual rationales and decisions, but to social dynamics. Even if we recognize that planning at the district level and below, as practised today, is mainly a financial exercise inspired by the guidelines of the Central Government development policies - particularly the new 20 points programme - ; even if, as such, District Credit Plans and Integrated Rural Development Programme block plans cannot be considered as full-fledged comprehensive planning, an interesting conclusion emerges from a study of these documents: the minimal information they provide on social data is striking.

The District Credit Plan, South Arcot 1983-1985, for instance, presents very useful block profiles in a systematic series, covering the entire district.<sup>21</sup> This is one of the very rare documents offering a synthetic picture of South Arcot, at block level. These block profiles list no fewer than 180 numbered points of information (see annexure 1). However, out of 180 figures, just a few (roughly 20) shed some light on the social structure: rural-urban population, occupational distribution, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes population. The columns devoted to the size of holdings do not distinguish irrigated land from non-irrigated land, nor do they show subdivisions below 1

hectare. No information at all is provided on the prevalent structure of property-tenancy, nor on the socio-economic subdivisions selected for the IRDP such as small farmers and marginal farmers. No information is provided on income, on current wages (although this data is collected, even if approximately, by the Rural Welfare Officers for the District Rural Development Agency). No attempt is made at defining the physical quality of life. More generally, there is no indication of *the trends of change*, which however are vital information for planners: no population growth rates, no economic growth rates, nothing on migration patterns, nor on the evolution of the urban-rural balance.

In other words, despite all their qualities, these block profiles illustrate three inadequacies the significance of which goes beyond the bounds of the credit plans as such, and has a broader effect on planning and analysis systems at the district level and below.

1. *First inadequacy*: a lapse in the information system, resulting from the loss of some grass-roots level data. The household surveys conducted by the Rural Welfare Officer are probably approximate, but they provide information on income and assets for which no substitute exists at that level, on this spatial extent.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, this data is just a provisional tool for identification of IRDP beneficiaries. For the DRDA, henceforth, the key data is that referring to its operations (targets, loans granted, etc.). Apparently, the information data collected prior to the programme operation is afterwards left aside, despite its potential usefulness for building a more accurate picture of blocks and villages. This kind of under-utilization of data, in fact, is just one facet of the limits of the well known departmental approach, each department running its information system according to its own rationale, whilst bridges between departments would enrich the information banks of all of them, and would sharpen their tools for planning.

2. *Second inadequacy*: the heavy prevalence of static information. The block profile offers no picture of the recent evolution of the concerned area, and except for 1981 Census population, no dates are given: the series of information provided refers to different years (sometimes to different decades) but his heterogeneity is not explicit. Is this because no particular attention is paid to evolutionary trends? When available, some projections are provided, but only for topical targets for the Five Year Plan period.

This lack of consideration given to trends, and particularly recent trends governing spatial and socio-economic dynamics is a testimony of the overall conception of action and evaluation in development or credit

agencies. Annual Reports or monthly evaluations conducted at District level by the Planning and Development Department, by force of circumstance, are mainly concerned with target coverage. At the grass-roots level, consequently, the aim is first of all to reach the target. Evolution, when it appears, is usually limited to the double trend of targets and achievements. The problem is that, in this type of accounting, achievements are compared only with targets, not with a constantly reassessed estimation of social needs, which regular surveys at the grass-roots level could help to formulate.

3. *Third inadequacy*: the prevalence of quantitative physical information is as great as the prevalence of static information. Physical amenities and assets are listed, but without a parallel qualitative assessment of their effective impact. Crop areas are given in the block profiles, but not the yields. Industrial units are listed in great detail, but not their output.

This focus on quantitative physical information results in another severe shortcoming: vital information of operational significance is absent, simply because they are beyond the scope of the common statistical tools used for block planning. The data is either practically absent, or not readily available, as is the case for many private trades or investment activities. The data may result from estimates, like those of the National Sample Surveys, which are apparently not regularly consulted below the district level, as they do not necessarily coincide with clear cut action areas; or as the data is very slowly processed: migration data for instance which is processed by Census authorities, and which, once again, is not available at the block level.

An additional problem of major importance is the relevance of the data available, sometimes ambiguous, sometimes dubious. The statistics relating to property and tenancy are a well-known case in this respect.

Lack of data, unreliability of data, non-utilisation of neglected data: these three hurdles do not facilitate the constant analysis exercise that ambitious multi-level planning would require.

The difficulties involved in obtaining more comprehensive data cannot be under-estimated, particularly as far as qualitative parameters are concerned. But one may wonder if, to a certain extent, the limitations of the information system are not simply itself, but are mainly - beyond the technical parameters - a consequence of the limitations of the overall planning policy as it stands today. Here we are

back to the question of the attitude behind the planning, the implementation and the evaluation exercises conducted at the district level and below (and probably above as well).

Up to a point, the question is political at both the ideological and the administrative levels: for whom does one plan? What type of analysis is required or not required for this or that type of planning?; to what extent do planners and development officers believe that, in their capacity as professionals with expertise, they can act for change with some degree of initiative? Are they necessarily subject to ready made guidelines laid down from above? Is the *nishkamiya karma* attitude mentioned by C.T. Kurien the only way open?

But technique also plays a part, at the higher levels where models, guidelines and instructions are evolved, and at grass-roots levels as well, where feedback is at least theoretically generated. Like other perceptions, perceptions of these micro-regional realities (be they blocks, villages, etc.) must be refined in order to be relevant; and this refinement methodology has to evolve. One has to be trained how to express these realities significantly, and how to correlate them with meso-and macro-regional parameters. And such a training requires that, for a time at least, the topical and departmental way of thinking instilled in the bureaucracy should be forgotten... Conceptualizing the spatial dimensions of growth and development and correlating them, at the block level or below, with an analysis of social stagnation or change is certainly not an easy task, all the less so when professional daily routine work has to be attended to.

The challenges and the inadequacies analysed above tend to seriously obstruct the formulation of grass-roots level planning. I believe the seriousness of the question could be diagnosed in two ways. The first refers to the techniques of planning; the second, to the advent of decentralized planning and to the philosophy of development.

As far as the techniques of planning and the models channelled up-down are concerned, one may have some doubts concerning the accuracy of the regional and micro-regional images that credit plans may elaborate, when so little attention is paid to demography, to distinctive growth rates of rural and urban populations, and to patterns and significance of non-employment or under-employment, to patterns and significance of migration. These are, after all, types of evolution which certainly deserve a line in a block profile where candle-making units and vermicelli cottage industry are granted one!

Turning to the philosophy of development, this lack of concern in the grass-roots plans for such fundamental facts related to men of flesh and blood (if not directly related to credit shares and bank investments) prompts another question: where should decentralized planning start, in such a conceptual and operational frame?

What role can people and particularly poor people play when the basic questions poor families ask themselves are not even technocratically echoed here: is, there enough employment available in the village or in the nearby town? If not, must one of us, or more than one, move out or migrate? If so, how and where? This kind of interrogation seems to be totally absent from the credit plans and rural development programmes running at the block level and below. The TRYSEM programme, NRLEP and IRDP do deal with the unemployment problem, but without clearly mentioning, in their report, the impact they have on the real employment challenge facing block after block, when targets are, on the one hand, very modest for the sake of realism, and, on the other hand, are more or less similar for all blocks, whatever their specificity.

The failure of the block profiles approach to formulate clearly these problems echoes significantly the failure of plans and programmes, which apparently do not establish themselves on a comprehensive and authentic image of the social dynamics of action areas. To plan or to act at the block-level without a clear picture of how the fundamental challenges faced by the nation affect each and every block can bring only limited results. The scarcity of rural employment, non-agricultural employment realistic prospects, rural out-migrations, urban-rural balance: dynamics, urbanization growth rates, small towns-metropolis balance: these national parameters of development are also to be analysed at the block level or below. Only this intimate knowledge of grass-roots spatial and social dynamics can sustain effective multi-level planning and enlighten decentralized planning.

## BEYOND THE TECHNOCRATIC AND BUREAUCRATIC APPROACHES

From the observations presented above two conclusions of operational relevance may emerge in the first stage.

1. The need for a better information system at the district level and below - particularly at the block level - calls for computerization of the enormous amount of data regularly collected in the districts and for more adequate mapping techniques (including, when possible, automat-

ic mapping) as an absolute requirement for a more detailed and more sophisticated knowledge of the comprehensive dimensions of change, in space as well as in time. I leave this point to the experts.

2. the need for a more adequate study of human factors and particularly people rationales requires that more attention be given to qualitative analysis, and fresh scope be found for quantitative investigation. Only in a combined approach to the two can due attention be paid to social dynamics in their spatial dimensions. Regional planning, be it conducted through an up-down multi-level strategy or through a decentralized process calling for people participation, calls precisely for social planning and area development to be considered in conjunction. It has to consider the whole spectrum of factors acting towards change or impending change (which change? and with what social consequences?) in the action area. Hence the question: in such an intricate context built up by so many correlations and combinations, which kind of regional or micro-regional studies can provide a clue in this regard? The relevance of the answer would depend upon its response to some of the some important challenges planners and developers face in India today, such as:

. *the pressure on resources*, including naturally the pressure of population on the environment: at stake here are the questions of identification of potential resources, their use, their preservation or renewability. Risks of ecological imbalances (water table, soil erosion, deforestation) are a facet of the problem; the sound economic exploitation of under-used potentials is another one. Both act upon the level of employment and, henceforth, on the population the area can support satisfactorily in the given techno-economic and social structure.

. *the evolution of the rural social structure* and the transformation of the agrarian structure, as a result of what we might call the green revolution rationale, marked by the selective and competitive access to capital and markets required by modern agriculture running for higher productivity. Although food production increased greatly, progress in access to food and to employment were much more debatable: Census statistics show that in twenty years (1961-1981) in South Arcot, the number of male cultivators rose by 2,2 %, while the number of male agricultural labourers rose by 55.5 %. There were roughly two male agricultural labourers for every five male cultivators in 1961 in the district: the ratio was three to five, twenty years later.

. *the unemployment and poverty challenge* and the inadequate potential of non-agricultural jobs available either in the villages or in the local towns. How positive could they be, IRDP, RLEGP and NREP do

not seem to make a decisive dent in the problem of rural poverty: if we accept Professor M. Adisheshiah's analysis, "the absolute number of the poor remains unchanged", as many newcomers join the poverty ranks while development programmes lift some poor people above the poverty line.<sup>23</sup>

*. the challenge of unbalanced urban growth*, characterized by the oversized growth of big metropolises, and by the inadequate dynamism of small and medium size towns, particularly evident in South Arcot.

Sharpening the tools for multi-level planning, however, is not an end by itself, and in such a matter, as in all attempts at genuine development, the decisive factors are fundamentally social and political. If decentralized planning has to emerge, only a strong political will backing (and backed by) popular involvement could enforce it, at the risk, of course, of social tensions and increased regional competitions. Beyond pre-electoral statements strongly advocating the urge for decentralized planning, are there any political force and administrative apparatus really ready to engage themselves in such a disturbing process? Thus the limitations of the prevailing departmental approach, as well as the bureaucratic lapses observed in present district planning, express only for a part what could be labelled as technical inadequacies: local shortcomings are *also* the testimonies of national choices and state-level policies. Besides the financial constraints which must not be underestimated, the overall role really assigned by New Delhi (and subsidiarily by Madras) to planning and to decentralization is crucial for changing - or not changing - the atmosphere and the vision required for stimulating at all levels, those in charge of the evaluation of needs, of the formulation of plans, and of the implementation of programmes. As a matter of fact, a truly decentralized planning would require not just pertinent techniques and political will, but also new relationships between planners, bureaucrats, politicians and the rural poor. Such hypothetical new relationships, in a way, may well amount to some sort of a revolution in the bureaucrats' and grass-roots level officers' conceptions about social hierarchies and villagers' aptitude to express through appropriate channels workable proposals for a change for the better. The key for an authentic multi-level social planning lays henceforth - if it exist - beyond the mere technocratic and bureaucratic approaches.

For all that, however, - and whichever type of planning the political power chooses to implement - the limited sectoral targeting disguised as district plan as well as the phantom decentralized process

much talked about, require both some technical assessments of socio-economic patterns encapsuled in spatial entities. Tools are nothing by themselves. But sharpened tools as mediums of better social and spatial knowledge might not be unnecessary if the decentralized option gains momentum in the future, or even if the up-down approach presently prevailing is bound to stay - whatever its limitations may be.

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- interesting "inter industry analysis" the criteria selected for the identification of three sub-regions is not much more than a three fold aggregation of taluks.
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## II

### District Plan Process: The Karnataka Case

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Until the early 1970s, the macro plan goal having been growth maximisation, the planners at Delhi allocated more and more resources to those sectors, regions and sections of the community which were well-endowed and, by reason of this, had higher levels of productive potential. When the growth maximising perspective of the centralised decision-making process produced a growth scenario of the enclave type - growth being achieved in some sectors, regions and among some sections of the community - when it caused regional, sectoral and sectional income disparities of a wider magnitude, and did not reduce the incidence of poverty and unemployment, a search was on for an alternative planning strategy. It was felt that planning, to be more meaningful, ought to be responsive to the local level problems and capable of resolving such problems by a better use of local resources and by carrying out planning exercises at local levels. Also plan implementation should be made more effective by developing decentralised data collecting, administrative and political institutional structures. It is these imperatives of achieving equity in growth, making planning more responsive to local level problems and ensuring better implementation of the plan programmes that built up a case for the deployment of decentralised plan process. As a first step towards achieving the goal of decentralised planning, district planning was added to the kit of national (and state) plan agenda.

Decentralised planning being a new concept, there arose the need for an understanding of the principles and techniques of such a plan process. Accordingly, over a period of time, a good deal of literature came to be developed on the subject both in the Government and academic circles. The first and the foremost task of the planners was to understand the content, methodology and strategy of district planning. As part of facilitating this process the Planning Commission set up in September 1982 a Working Group on District Planning which defined district planning as "a kind of area based sub-state planning and (it) arises from the need to supplement the national and state plans with a more detailed examination of the resources, problems and potentials of local areas (i.e., districts), so that investment programmes more specifically tailored to the particular needs of each district could be evolved and implemented".<sup>1</sup> From this long and somewhat complex de-

inition one can draw the following implications for the district plan formulation process :

- (1) The methodology of planning of a district should consist in developing a mechanism which (a) identifies the local needs of the people, (b) ascertains the growth potential of the area on the basis of an assessment of the available local resources and budgetary allocations from the state, (c) draws up priorities in regard to programmes and schemes, and (d) helps in formulating a strategy for maximising the outcome. The plan strategy in respect of district planning has to be an area-based sub-state strategy - possibly to be carried out in the framework of integrated area development strategy.
- (2) The district planning mechanism described above calls for the setting up of (a) a district level data collecting machinery, (b) a decentralised political institution that can articulate the people's needs and aspirations, and (c) a decentralised administrative structure to formulate and implement the district plans.
- (3) Finally, since the district is seen as a sub-system of the multi-level planning, there is a need for dovetailing of the district plans with the plans at the higher as well as the lower levels with a view to promoting an integrated planning effort in the State economy.

District plan practices have been in vogue in almost all the States in the country though curiously enough the content of such planning and its rigour vary widely across the States. It would be, however, of some interest to review the experience of district planning in the country. For operational reasons the case of Karnataka is presented here which incidentally had a good start in district plan exercises thanks to the keen interest evinced by the then Government of Karnataka which created a Department of Planning manned largely by trained economists and supervised by the Economic Adviser to the Government. As part of imparting professionalism to district plan exercises the university and college teachers who were specifically trained for the purpose were associated with the district bureaucracy in the preparation of the district plan documents. Though this arrangement was discontinued subsequently, qualified persons were drawn from different departments to fill the positions of district planning officers who provided the professional inputs to district plan exercises. Besides, Karnataka has a good record in respect of political decentralisation, manifest first in the Panchayati raj system and now in Zilla Parishads and Mandal Panchayats which ensure an institutional ar-

rangement for articulating people's needs and aspirations. It is this record of the association of professionalism with plan formulation and of political decentralisation which justifies our undue curiosity into, and interest about, the state of art of district planning in Karnataka.

The purpose of the present paper is to bring out broadly the initiatives, approaches and practices in district planning followed by the Government of Karnataka from time to time and also to identify the gaps in the district plan mechanics developed so far in the state. The Working Group on District Planning on the basis of the state of art in different states had concluded that the States were actually located along a centralisation-decentralisation continuum scale<sup>2</sup> meaning that they were yet to make a full mark as far as developing decentralised planning mechanics is concerned. It may be admitted that Karnataka is no exception to this generalisation. However, as the above authority had also observed, Karnataka is one of the five states (others being Maharashtra, Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh) which have achieved some degree of decentralisation in regard to planning. While admitting that Karnataka has made some degree of progress in regard to plan decentralisation and that it still needs to go a long way, it is our intention here to document the state of art in Karnataka. Our approach to the study of district planning in Karnataka is comparative in the sense that the Karnataka case is compared with the normative model of district planning conceived by the Working Group on District Planning (and very broadly summarised in the above paragraphs). Needless to say how the non-availability of full information as also published literature on the subject has proved to be a major constraint in our effort at presenting a comprehensive account of the state of art regarding district plan process. The account presented here draws heavily from that status paper on district planning in Karnataka and a critical paper on the state of art (both prepared by the multi-level planning division of the Planning Commission and included in the Report of the Working Group on District Planning, vol. II)<sup>3</sup>.

## DISTRICT PLAN PROCESS

There could be two approaches to the study of experience with district planning. One is to just take stock of the state of art as it obtains now; the other is to provide a historical account of district planning sketching its evolution over years. As the latter approach has the advantage of bringing out new approaches followed and initiatives taken by the plan formulation agency from time to time it is proposed to follow this approach in the present paper. Following the example of the critical paper, the Karnataka experience is presented in phases of the

evolution of district planning. The two phases identified by the critical paper relate to the years 1978-82 (phase I) and 1983-86 (phase II). In our opinion, a new phase in district planning has begun with the introduction of political decentralisation in the State from 1987 and this can be regarded as the third phase of district planning.

### **The First Phase: 1978-82**

The first phase began with the building up of three most important elements of infrastructure. First, the State Planning Department developed a talukwise district data base - which was updated every year - as a means of providing a base for the exercise of taking resource inventory and assessing the development potential. Secondly, a technically qualified planning team was developed by the Planning Department for each district through a well-structured training programme in collaboration with the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore. Thirdly, perspective plans for the districts with a time horizon of ten years starting from the year 1974 were prepared as a first step in district level planning. The district plan formulation became the responsibility of two district bodies: one was the District Planning Committee under the chairmanship of the Deputy Commissioner with Project Director, DRDS, General Manager, DIC, District Development Assistant, District Publicity Officer, District Statistical Officer and District Planning Officer as members. The other body was the District Development Council with the Deputy Commissioner as the Chairman and the elected representatives of the people such as MPs, MLAs, MLGs, Taluk Development Board presidents, and all the district level development department officers as members - numbering nearly 100.

The initiation of planning for the district and plan formulation at the district level brought to the fore the issues of (1) clearly demarcating the sectors for the district level and state level planning and (2) evolving a basis for resources allocation to the district agency from the State exchequer. On the first issue, the criteria suggested were (a) whether a given scheme benefitted the district and promoted the socio-economic interests of the people belonging to the district in question and (b) whether such scheme could be planned and implemented at the district level. Based on these criteria the authorities demarcated the district and the state sectors in 1978-79. The district sector schemes under this arrangement related to agricultural production, soil conservation, forests, fisheries, animal husbandry, marketing, minor irrigation, small scale and rural industries, primary and secondary education, water supply and sanitation, welfare of weaker sections, district and village roads. On the second issue, the criteria evolved were more or less based on the Gadgil formula that governs allocation of resources from

the centre to the States i.e., 50 % on the basis of population and the remaining 50 % on the backwardness of the districts seen with reference to agricultural output, irrigation, industrial output, communication, financial infrastructure, medical and health facilities, power supply, incidence of unemployment, problems of weaker sections and so on.

Given the total district sector outlay which was fixed by the State Planning Department for implementing the district sector schemes, the individual district annual plan outlay was arrived at on the basis of the resource allocation formula referred to above from the year 1978-79 - when for the first time district planning exercises were undertaken. The District Planning Committee, viewing the priority structure evolved by them, distributed this amount among different sectors. Following this, the concerned heads of district level departments formulated programmes considering the outlay allocated to their departments by the district planning committee which subsequently were forwarded to the State Government for approval after duly getting the concurrence of the District Development Council (DDC).

#### **The Second Phase: 1983-86**

The district plans as presented to the State Government more often than not underwent drastic changes at the hands of the State Planning Department due to the following reasons:

- (a) the sectoral priorities determined at the district level did not coincide with State and national level priorities.
- (b) the district plan proposals many a time strayed into state level planning sectors;
- (c) the practice of the State Government changing the location of works recommended by the district planning authorities; and
- (d) within the sectors, the budgetted outlays did not accord with the outlays decided upon by the District Development Councils for different schemes.

If one looked at the reasons for the modification of the district plan proposals at the State level these obviously hint at the possibility of lack of integration of district plans with the State plan. As a follow-up to this experience some changes in the plan procedure were introduced from 1983-84 which brought in the second phase in district planning. To make district planning more meaningful and effective fresh guidelines were issued in 1982 for formulating the plan for 1983-84 and the plan process was accordingly modified.

A basic change introduced was that instead of the lumpsum allocation for all the sectors, minor-head wise outlays under each sector were provided. The DDCs were given a free hand to select any scheme or evolve a new scheme so long as it accorded with the financial limits indicated under the minor heads account. If there was a disagreement between the state heads of the departments and the DDCs either on the termination of the ongoing schemes or the content of new schemes or change of location of works the decision of the Government was final.

While the above change was meant to promote integration of district plans with the State plan, it inadvertently limited the freedom of DDCs of determining sectoral priorities. However, as a means of partly restoring back this freedom and also to enable the DDCs (a) to rectify distortions that possibly may arise in the sectoral priorities and (b) to take up programmes of local importance which met the needs and aspirations of the people a very important change was introduced from 1983-84. That is, a discretionary outlay of Rs. 40 lakhs for each district on an average was provided under the head "District Level Sub-Plan" to be entirely operated by the DDCs for the year 1983-84. Against this outlay, the DDCs could take up any Government approved plan schemes either for intensifying the on-going programmes in the district or for spatial extension of such programmes subject to the condition that there should neither be subsidy content nor should it involve creation of additional posts for the implementation of such schemes.

Considering, however, the small amount allocated for discretionary outlay (only 5 % of the total district outlay of Rs. 200 crores during 1983-84) and the stipulations listed therein for its utilisation, the above change can hardly be regarded as an instrument of decentralised plan process. The change-over from the lumpsum grants to prescriptive type allocative system under the sector-wise and minor-head-wise allocations during the second phase of district planning was, no doubt, intended to facilitate integration of district plans with the State plan. But this cannot be considered as the ideal method of securing plan integration. For, a position was taken by the critical paper that interaction, exchange, cooperation and resolution of conflicts between the State and the district level officials would have been a better alternative. That the State authorities instead chose to operate through financial allocation channel is a clear testimony to their unwillingness to share with the district level officials the powers of decision-making. Secondly, during this phase there hardly was an effective decentralised political institutional arrangement which identified and articulated the needs and aspirations of the people. It is true that the DDCs had provided for a participative forum to the people's representatives such

as MPs, MLAs, MLCs and some representatives of the weaker sections. But this arrangement could hardly be said to reflect and represent the true nature of people's needs and aspirations given the elitist nature of the DDCs and their functioning.

### **The Third Phase : 1987 onwards**

It is the above noted limitations of the decentralised planning mechanism that prepared the ground for the third phase of district planning in Karnataka. The most important innovation of this phase is the constitution of decentralised political institutions with the passing of the Karnataka Zilla Parishads, Taluk Panchayat Samithis, Mandal Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayats Act in July 1985. This Act which provided for decentralised political institutions at the district, taluk and mandal levels brought into being, among others, Zilla Parishads and Mandal Panchayats respectively at the district and the mandal levels - the institutions which have effective power to plan and to execute the development and welfare programmes - following elections held in January 1987.

With the establishment of Zilla Parishads all the development departments and agencies of the district - including the District Rural Development Societies - which were hitherto directly or indirectly involved in formulation and implementation of the various district level plan programmes have been brought under the umbrella of Zilla Parishads. The executive head of Zilla Parishads is the District Chief Secretary - a senior IAS officer, who works with the assistance of a Chief Accounts Officer, one or two Deputy Secretaries and some subject experts, under the control and supervision of the elected representatives. The traditional law and order matters are now being looked after by a separate district administrative head - the Deputy Commissioner - who normally is junior to the incumbent to the post of District Chief Secretary but works independently. This innovative change holds out two notable merits as far as district planning is concerned : (a) an effective mechanism for gauging and articulating people's needs and aspirations is evolved for the first time in the state ; and (b) an institutional arrangement for coordinating the efforts and resources of the various district development departments too is made. What is even more important is that the district chief development administrator is now made accountable to the elected representatives at the district level who otherwise was earlier accountable to his superiors at the state level.

One of the major functions of the ZPs is to formulate and implement district plans. In this task, they have not just to compile

schemes of different departments as was being done hitherto; they have to give a spatial dimension to the plan exercise using a modified, central place theory. In this exercise the planning body of the ZP is to locate the infrastructure facilities in a spatial hierarchical manner; using the growth center strategy and identifying growth centres the planning agency is expected to develop such growth centres which in turn are to transmit growth impulses to the lower level human settlements.

To facilitate this task of planning at the district level certain institutional and other innovations have been initiated. In the first place, there is a clear-cut defining of the schemes and programmes that fall under the jurisdiction of the State, Zilla Parishads and Mandal Panchayats. The ZPs and MPs are given responsibilities to plan and implement schemes in sectors such as agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, cooperation, irrigation and ground water resources, public health, education, district and rural roads, small and cottage industries, welfare of SCs and STs and so on in their respective areas of jurisdiction. Secondly, the setting up of a district planning unit comprising of a Chief Planning Officer, a Regional Planning Officer, a Project Appraisal Officer, a Statistical Officer and other experts at each district, setting up of a district planning cell in the State Planning Department, conducting of Karnataka Development Programme monthly review meetings at district level to monitor the progress of district schemes are the next set of innovations which impart some degree of expertise to, as also ensure that action is being taken on, district plan formulation and implementation. The third notable innovation is the establishment of the State Development Council, under the Chairmanship of the Chief Minister and Presidents of all ZPs who work as members, on the pattern of the National Development Council which gives an opportunity to the district elected representatives to evolve plan priorities and policies. The most important innovative initiative in the district plan process in Karnataka is the provision for periodically appointing a State Finance Commission with a chairman and two members on the lines of the National Finance Commission to recommend the pattern of financial transfers from the State Government to the ZPs and to evolve principles which should govern the grants-in-aid from the State Government to the Zilla Parishads. The first state Finance Commission with Dr. Honavar as chairman has been appointed immediately after the new Panchayatiraj institutions were formed and its report is awaited.

During the first year of their formation i.e., 1987-88, the ZPs had merely to implement the district plans that had already been prepared by the state level heads of departments and included in the State's plan budget<sup>4</sup>, as they hardly had enough time to formulate their own plans.

The ZPs have actually assumed active role in planning from the current year i.e., 1988-89. According to the procedure laid down, the ZPs are allotted a total plan outlay of about Rs. 240 crores for the current year which is to be distributed among the 19 ZPs on the basis of the indicators and weight ages as shown in Table 1. Of what is called "the district free plan outlay", which is very negligible as will be shortly seen, a third is retained by the ZPs for implementing their own schemes and two-thirds are allocated for the mandal panchayat plan schemes.

**Table 1 : Indicators and weightage for determining ZPs share in State Plan Outlay.**

Indicators	Weights (%)
1. Population	50
2. Backwardness in agriculture as measured by the value of agricultural output per hectare	5
3. Backwardness in irrigation as measured by the proportion of irrigated area to net area sown	7
4. Backwardness as measured by the value of industrial output	5
5. Backwardness in communications as measured by road and railway mileage per 100 sq. km. and per lakh of population	5
6. Backwardness in financial infrastructure as measured by size of population served by each commercial and cooperative bank	2
7. Backwardness in medical and health facilities as measured by the number of hospitals per 1,000 population/bed population ratio	5
8. Backwardness in power supply as measured by the proportion of villages electrified	5
9. Problems of the weaker sections :	
(a) as measured by the proportion of SCs/STs in the population	2
(b) as measured by the proportion of landless agricultural labourers	2
10. Special problems of Malnad areas and drought prone areas.:	
(a) as measured by the area under forest	2
(b) as measured by the rural population of drought prone areas	2
11. Literacy percentage	5
12. Performance in Family Planning Programme	3
	Total 100

Source: Planning Department, Govt. of Karnataka, *Karnataka Draft Annual Plan, 1987-88*, Bangalore, 1986, pp. 79-80.

The criteria for determining the mandals' share of plan outlay out of the district free plan outlay are presented in Table 2. A special feature of the allocative scheme of the mandals is that some weightage to resources raised by them is provided as a means of providing incentive for raising their own resources. This provision is absent in the case of the ZPs as they are not expected to mobilise tax resources.

Table 2 : Indicators and weightages for determining mandals' share in District Plan Outlay

Sl. No.	Indicators	Weightage (in %)
1.	Population	50
2.	Area of Mandal	15
3.	Dryland area	15
4.	Agricultural labour population	10
5.	Per-capita resources realised	10
		100

Source : Same as given for Table I.

The district plan process actually starts at the grass roots level and the calendar for the planning is as follows: some time towards the end of July the Planning Department indicates to Zilla Parishads and Mandal Panchayats the financial ceiling within which their Annual Plan should be formulated for the next year. As a first step in the plan formulation, the village assembly identifies programmes for the development of the village and presents them to the Mandal Panchayat. The latter formulates, on the basis of this feedback, plans relating to local works such as water supply, sanitation, rural communication and so on. These plans are sent to ZPs around mid-August where they are discussed. The ZPs prepare a district plan including the mandal plans and by September and send it on to the State Planning Department and concerned State Head of Department. During September end and October end the State Planning Department at the State Development Council meeting, to which the ZP Chairman and State Department heads are invited, seeks to achieve consistency and integration of district sector schemes with the state sector schemes and tentatively finalises the district plans. At this stage care is taken to ensure that adequate provision is made for committed and essential expenditure on on-going schemes, salaries and minimum needs programmes. By mid-November the State Departments consolidate the ZP schemes and build them into the various State sector programmes. The resultant draft annual plan is sent to the Planning Commission which fixes the State plan outlay for the year. Depending on the changes, if any, effected to the State plan outlay by the Planning Commission the district plans and

their outlay are also likely to be changed, and the State plan budget is presented to the Legislature in the first week of March along with the link document which gives schemewise, sectorwise and ZP-wise outlays.

## AN ASSESSMENT

Having outlined the district plan process we may now compare the actual with the normative plan model spelt out in the above pages and see how far does the Karnataka model meet the requirements of a good decentralised plan model.

### **Institutional Infrastructure:**

A crucial prerequisite of district planning, as noted earlier, is the creation of informational, decision-making and administrative agencies that respectively generate the required factual and statistical information, identify and articulate people's needs and aspirations, and formulate and implement the district plan. Karnataka seems to have taken some significant steps in this direction having in the late 70s developed a talukwise data collecting district level machinery, structured a district level planning administrative machinery which was equipped with trained personnel and set up broad-based DDCs with people's representatives and bureaucracy which performed the work of identifying and articulating people's needs and aspirations in a limited way. The establishment of Zilla Parishads recently has further strengthened the plan infrastructure base which, for the first time, has evolved a mechanism whereby not only the bureaucracy is made accountable to the elected people's representatives but the departmental coordination is made possible under the aegis of the ZP and the supervision of the district Chief Secretary. The question of harmonising the activities of the various development departments at the district level which has been an eye sore to the district planning agency for a very long time has at last found an answer in the ZPs.

### **Planning Frame :**

The development of the district plan infrastructure referred to in the above paragraphs created the necessary atmosphere and facilities conducive to formulating the district plans in the integrated area development framework. The first step to be followed for carrying out the district plan in this framework is identification of the district sector schemes (so that overlapping of the functions of the State and district

planning agencies is avoided) and disaggregation of plan funds from the State level to the district level. To make the district level planning agency more effective in its operations and, as part of promoting this, to impart some degree of autonomy to it, there is also the need for evolving a formal scheme of devolution of funds from the State to the district authority. During the first phase of district plan process itself it was decided that the schemes which could be planned and implemented at the district level and those schemes which benefitted the district and promoted the interests of the local people should be treated as district sector schemes. On the basis of a formula akin to the Gadgil formula of devolution of funds, which is being employed to govern centre-state financial devolution, the district plan outlays were fixed. Subsequently, the scheme of minor-headwise outlays, instead of lumpsum allocation for district sectoral planning and a discretionary outlay to be entirely operated by the district plan agency, was introduced during the second phase. This was followed by a scheme of annual grants both for plan and non-plan expenditure to the ZPs when they came into being. The credit for these initiatives, however, cannot be ascribed to the Karnataka Government as such. For, much before these changes in the district plan process were initiated in the State, these practices had been in vogue in Gujarat and Maharashtra. In fact, in Gujarat the localism element in planning as seen through the extent of discretionary and incentive outlays was quite significant being 20 % of the State plan outlay. Besides, the practice of providing for an incentive outlay (5 % of the State plan outlay) for the district plans to be matched by the district authorities which evokes enthusiasm among the local population to plan for local schemes, and the allocation of some 60-75 % of the district discretionary funds to taluks on the basis of population and backwardness criteria<sup>5</sup> unfortunately do not have parallels in the Karnataka case. However, the practice of appointing State Finance Commissions in Karnataka to determine the principles and quantum of devolution of funds from the State to Panchayatiraj institutions is the most significant innovation and, perhaps, has no parallel anywhere in the country.

The demarcation of the district plan sectors and financial devolution prepared the ground for decentralised planning at the district level and provided an opportunity for the district planning agency to plan for the district in an integrated area development framework. Whether this opportunity was fully utilised by the district planning agencies could only be ascertained at the field level. In the absence of field studies on this issue it will be difficult here to comment on the manner of district plan strategies evolved and followed. If, however, the results of a survey<sup>6</sup> conducted by the present writer in a different context could be of some guide it appears that at least the DRDS and

DICs in Kolar and Dharwar districts attempted such exercises while planning the anti-poverty schemes such as IRDP and TRYSEM. It is now known whether the district planning agencies carried out such exercises as part of the district planning process.

The practice of demarcating the State and the district sector schemes and of asking the district planning bodies to operate within the framework of resource allocation on the basis of minor-head outlays under each of the sectors provided an excellent mechanism for dovetailing of the district plan with the State plan. Though this practice was considered as a retrograde step viewed from the point of the autonomy of the district planning agency, it, however, had the potential of integrating the planning efforts of the district and State planning agencies. However, some indication was available on the shape of things to come. Thus, the State Seventh Plan had indicated that during the seventh plan period "only the main sectoral provisions of the Annual Plan will be prescribed by the Government for each district, leaving to the authority the detailed scheme-wise formulation of the District Plan. The district plans so prepared will be compiled by the Government and discussed with the Planning Commission along with the State Sector Plan".<sup>7</sup> The above position taken by the Seventh Plan and the establishment of the decentralised planning, administrative and political machinery at the district and mandal levels in 1987 naturally raised great deal of expectations about the possibility of the expansion of area discretion in the matter of district and mandal level planning and implementation. This expectation has, however, been belied as can be shortly seen.

The extent of autonomy or discretion available to the district level planning authority can broadly be gauged in terms of the jurisdiction it has over the district plan schemes and projects. But since schemes and projects do not lend themselves to quantification the more appropriate way of measuring the area of discretion is, perhaps, the share of district outlay in the total State outlay - particularly that part of the district outlay which the district authorities operate exclusively. It may be worthwhile to assess district autonomy in this sense. It will be noted that out of the State plan outlay of Rs. 900 crores for 1988-89 about Rs. 240 crores are earmarked as district plan outlay. The latter has to be distributed across schemes exclusively to be planned and implemented by ZPs and Mandal Panchayats, and those the state and the centre operate. The distribution pattern of the district plan outlay across different heads of account is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3 : Distribution of District Plan Outlay Across Heads of Accounts**

S1. No.	Heads of Account	Allocation (Rs. in Crores)	% to total
1.	Salaries and allowances	48.53	20.2
2.	Matching outlay for centrally sponsored schemes	76.96	32.1
3.	Minimum Needs Programmes	30.00	12.5
4.	Spillover works of previous year	30.39	12.7
5.	Committed on-going schemes related to scholarships, hospitals, schools, hostels etc.	20.00	8.4
6.	Balance of free outlay	33.90	14.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>239.78</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source : Ramakrishna Hegde, "Decentralised Planning in Karnataka", *Southern Economist*, Nov. 1, 1988, p. 12

Assuming that the schemes listed under the first five heads of account in the Table are those on which the ZPs and MPs possibly have no control these schemes take away 86 % of the so-called district outlay leaving only about 14 % to the district authorities to plan and implement their own schemes. It is also stated that this 14 % of the outlay has to be shared between the ZP schemes and the MP schemes in the ratio of 1/3 and 2/3 respectively. This would amount to saying that the effective area of discretion available for district planning is only 5 % of what is described as the District Plan Outlay. The extremely low level of discretionary or free outlay is a mockery of the very philosophy underlying the decentralised plan process. However, this being defended as follows: "...there is a wide area of autonomy vested in the Zilla Parishads/Mandal Panchayats in the implementation of the schemes. They can determine the location where relevant, decide on various parameters of implementation, and within certain limits, give up or add certain schemes, and increase or decrease outlays. As spillover and committed works get exhausted, the area of autonomy would increase considerably".<sup>8</sup> This means that the district governments will have to wait till spillover and committed works get exhausted to have their area of plan formulation autonomy expanded. They should also draw solace from the fact that they enjoy considerable amount of autonomy in regard to implementation of the schemes.

### **Dovetailing of Plans**

Apart from linking itself up with the State level plans, the district plan should dovetail itself with the district sub-divisional -the block or

mandal level- plans, which are more specifically meant to effectively use the locally available resources, particularly human resources. These plans are meant to plan for alleviation of poverty and unemployment, and location of amenities as against the sectoral orientation given to the district plan. As a step towards planning for the block after the district perspective plans were prepared the State Government commissioned in the late 70's (a) block plan studies for full employment with a view to assessing the existing level and type of unemployment in select blocks<sup>9</sup> and (b) a study relating to employment potential of plan schemes to ascertain the direct and indirect employment effect of the plan schemes.<sup>10</sup> These studies were expected to provide the needed data base to plan for employment generation. Also, a number of block-based household studies were commissioned for identifying the people living below the poverty line for the purpose of giving them assistance under IRDP. However, all these efforts have been directed towards poverty and unemployment alleviation among rural households; these, however, could hardly be regarded as exercises in block planning in the strict sense of the term.

With the establishment of ZPs for local level district plan preparation the whole idea of block planning has become shrouded in uncertainty. Under the new Panchayatiraj legislation the Taluk Panchayat Samithi is created at the taluk level but it has only a supervisory and not a planning role. Therefore, for all practical purposes the planning area unit below the district seems to be the mandal. The Mandal Panchayat under the Act is charged with the task, among others, of formulation and preparation of mandal panchayat agricultural production plans and some local works but this hardly can be equated with what the Dantwala Committee envisaged under its concept of block planning. In a State like Maharashtra, the District Planning and Development Councils allocate the resources obtained from the State Government to the blocks on the basis of area and population. Just as at the district level a distinction is made between the State sector schemes and the district sector schemes, the schemes to be implemented at the block level are demarcated into "district level schemes", "reserved allocation for block level schemes" and "block level schemes". The allocation of funds to these various categories of schemes have been fixed in the ratio of 25:10:65. Though no such detailed scheme demarcation is made in Karnataka the mandals are expected to prepare plans for the identified local works referred to earlier. However, since the executive head of Mandal Panchayat is only a non-gazetted officer and given the expertise he commands on the art and science of planning one can easily imagine how effectively plan formulation could be done at the mandal level. Under the provisions of the Act the MP plans are to be prepared at the MP level and discussed at

the district level in the ZP. But owing to lack of expertise at MP level it is said that the MP plans are actually being prepared at the district level.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Government of Karnataka have been quite innovative in regard to the creation of the district plan-oriented infrastructure. The new initiatives taken in this regard are (a) setting up of a talukwise data collecting information agency at the district headquarters, (b) evolution of a decentralised political and administrative structure, and (c) a clear-cut demarcation of areas of planning as between State, district and mandals as also evolution of an appropriate financial devolution system which will be rationalised soon by the State Finance Commission whose report is awaited.

There, however, are some areas which are weak and in respect of which the Government has to, perhaps, learn from other States like Maharashtra and Gujarat as a means of taking the district plan process closer to what is expected of it under the ideal circumstances. One area where a new initiative is required is in regard to the plan formulation autonomy to be enjoyed by ZPs and MPs. As the district free outlay, which is a rough measure of the sub-state Government's autonomy, is extremely low at present there is a clear case for increasing it in some measure. Secondly, while the ZP planning machinery is well-equipped with the required planning expertise there is absolutely no expertise available at the MP-level. Therefore, some initiatives are needed to strengthen the planning machinery at this level too.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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1. *Report of the Working Group on District Planning*, Vol. 1, Planning Commission, Government of India, May 1984, p. 22.
2. *Report of the Working Group on District Planning*, op. cit. p. 27.
3. Hereafter these documents will be referred to as status paper and critical paper respectively.
4. See Planning Department, Government of Karnataka, *Draft Annual Plan, 1988-89*, Bangalore, 1987, p. IV-4.

5. For details see *Report of the Working group on District Planning*. Vol. II, op. cit.
6. Abdul Aziz, *Integrated Rural Development Programme in Karnataka : An Evaluation* (unpublished), Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore, 1986.
7. Planning Department, *Draft Seventh Five Year Plan, 1985-90*, Government of Karnataka, Bangalore, 1985, p. 174
8. Ramakrishna Hegde, "Decentralised Planning in Karnataka", *Southern Economist*, Nov. 1, 1988, p. 12.
9. A number of such block plans were prepared by universities and research institutions in Karnataka.
10. Abdul Aziz and P.H. Rayappa, *Employment Potential of Plan Schemes in Karnataka* (unpublished), Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore. 1978.

## Questions de planification décentralisée: deux études en Inde du Sud

L'Inde a fondé sa stratégie de développement sur quelques grands concepts aux rangs desquels il faut compter l'économie mixte et la planification. Quatre décennies de planification n'ont pourtant pas éliminé la pauvreté de masse. Un double problème s'est donc posé. Pour mieux identifier les besoins à la base et pour tenter de mieux les satisfaire, à quelles techniques de planification faut-il recourir, et quelles réformes politico-administratives faut-il opérer? L'organisation constitutionnelle de l'Union indienne laisse en ces domaines une certaine marge de manœuvre aux Etats qui la constituent. Le contraste est net entre ceux (congressistes ou non) qui ont tenté de promouvoir une planification décentralisée en créant des instances compétentes au niveau des districts, des blocs de développement, voire en-deçà, et les Etats où la définition des opérations à conduire à la base résulte pour l'essentiel d'une planification bureaucratique.

Les deux études réunies ici abordent à cet égard des cas de figure bien distincts. J. Racine, dans une étude consacrée au district du south Arcot, dans l'Etat du Tamilnad, souligne combien les tentatives de décentralisation esquissées après 1970 ont tourné court, et analyse les techniques en jeu —et leurs insuffisances— dans les années 80 : exemple de planification par le sommet, manquant d'outils assez affinés à la base. A. Aziz, pour sa part, tente une première évaluation des réformes conduites dans l'Etat du Karnataka depuis 1987 pour mettre en place une véritable planification décentralisée, suivant ainsi la voie tracée par d'autres Etats (Maharashtra, Gujarat, Jammu et Cachemire, Bengale Occidental). Pour autant, l'impact réel de pareilles réformes en matière de décentralisation démocratique des pouvoirs et de développement effectif reste mesuré : techniquement et politiquement, la planification décentralisée n'est plus un mythe, mais elle demeure un défi.

*Mots-clés* : Inde, Tamilnad, Karnataka  
Techniques de planification  
Réformes administratives  
Décentralisation.

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